

The attached cable on crime in Leningrad  
provides another small and interesting glimpse.

Harry Rowen  
C/NIC

Attachment

Date 18 November 1981

01 USE PREVIOUS  
EDITIONS

Distribution:

- 1 - Bob Gates, NIO/USSR
- 1 - Ass't NIO/USSR
- 1 - NIO/E
- 1 - Hans Heymann, NIO/AL
- 1 - Andy Marshall, D/Net Assessment, DoD
- 1 - Richard Perle, Ass't Sec/International Security Policy, DoD
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State Dept. review completed

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 TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 7809  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L COMBINED SECTION

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE Leningrad 02507

E.O. 12065: N/A

TAGS: SOCI, PINT, UR

SUBJECT: VIOLENT CRIME IN Leningrad (LOU)

1. SUMMARY. VIOLENT CRIME, OFTEN DISMISSED BY WESTERN OBSERVERS AS A MARGINAL ASPECT OF SOVIET LIFE, HAS BECOME A FREQUENT TOPIC OF DISCUSSION DURING THE PAST YEAR AMONG OUR UNOFFICIAL Leningrad CONTACTS AND IN THE LOCAL PRESS. OUR CONTACTS GENERALLY AGREE THAT PERSONAL SAFETY ON THE STREETS AND AT HOME HAS DETERIORATED MARKEDLY OVER THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS. JUDGING BY THE RECENT SURGE OF PRESS ARTICLES ON VIOLENT CRIME, LOCAL AUTHORITIES WOULD

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SEEM TO CONCUR. END SUMMARY.

2. AN AMERICAN'S COMMENT THAT HE FEELS SAFER AT NIGHT ON THE STREETS OF LENINGRAD THAN IN HIS HOME CITY IN THE U.S. COMMONLY ELICITS GUFFAWS FROM OUR LOCAL CONTACTS, THE RETORT, "WELL, YOU SHOULDN'T," AND AN ACCOUNT OF A PERSONAL, OR FRIEND'S, EXPERIENCE, RANGING FROM MUGGING TO MURDER. SOME SAMPLES:

-- A MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN WAS ROBBED OF HER VALUABLES AT KNIFE-POINT IN THE ENTRYWAY OF HER APARTMENT BUILDING AT 5:30 P.M. LAST JANUARY. SHE HAD SOME ROUGH MOMENTS WHEN HER YOUNG ASSAILANT, DISSATISFIED WITH THE FEW RUBLES, CHEAP WATCH AND WEDDING RING SHE HAD SURRENDERED, ACCUSED HER OF HOLDING OUT ON HIM AND THREATENED HER WITH THE KNIFE. OUR ACQUAINTANCE IS CERTAIN THE YOUTH WOULD HAVE STABBED HER HAD HE NOT BEEN FRIGHTENED AWAY BY FOOTSTEPS ON THE STAIRS.

-- A YOUNG WOMAN WAS SURROUNDED BY A GANG OF SIX YOUTHS ON A MAJOR LENINGRAD THOROUGHFARE ONE NIGHT RECENTLY, FORCED AGAINST A WALL AND SEXUALLY MOLESTED. THE ATTACKERS, CONTENT TO FRIGHTEN AND HUMILIATE HER, LET THE YOUNG WOMAN GO AFTER A FEW MINUTES; SHE COULD HEAR THEM LAUGHING AS SHE RAN AWAY. SHE DOES NOT BELIEVE THEY WERE DRUNK.

-- A STUDENT AT A MAJOR LENINGRAD TECHNICAL INSTITUTE WAS ROBBED AND MURDERED OUTSIDE HIS DORMITORY EARLY ONE EVENING AT THE BEGINNING OF THIS YEAR.

-- A MIDDLE-AGED LENINGRAD UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR WAS BEATEN TO DEATH LAST YEAR BY A GANG OF "HOOLIGANS" IN AN ATTEMPTED ROBBERY NEAR THE SCHOOL'S PETERHOF CAMPUS.

-- A YOUNG MAN WAS SURPRISED IN HIS DOWNTOWN APARTMENT THIS SPRING BY THREE YOUTHS WHO DEMANDED HE HAND OVER HIS VALUABLES. WHEN THE YOUNG MAN RESISTED, THE YOUTHS BEAT HIM WITH METAL PIPES, RANSACKED THE APARTMENT FOR SALABLE OBJECTS, STOLE HIS WALLET

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AND ESCAPED. THE VICTIM DIED AFTER 40 DAYS IN A COMA.

3. THE LOCAL PRESS HAS RECENTLY BEGUN TO REFLECT POPULAR CONCERN WITH VIOLENT CRIME. WHILE NEWSPAPERS DID NOT IN THE PAST IGNORE THE EXISTENCE OF CRIME IN LENINGRAD, THEY TENDED TO CONFINE REPORTING TO SO-CALLED "ECONOMIC" CRIMES (THEFT OF STATE PROPERTY, BLACKMARKETEERING, OFFICIAL CORRUPTION) AND "HOOLIGANISM" (VANDALISM, MALICIOUS MISCHIEF, PETTY THIEVERY). REPORTS OF VIOLENT CRIME WERE RESERVED FOR THE INTERNATIONAL PAGE. SINCE THE SPRING OF THIS YEAR, HOWEVER, ACCOUNTS OF LOCAL VIOLENCE HAVE BECOME A REGULAR FEATURE IN THE LENINGRAD PRESS.

4. MUGGING IS THE VIOLENT CRIME MOST FREQUENTLY REPORTED IN LOCAL NEWSPAPERS (FOR RECENT EXAMPLES, SEE "VECHERNIY LENINGRAD," SEPT. 2, OCT. 31). THE MODUS OPERANDI IS FAMILIAR TO U.S. URBAN DWELLERS: ATTACKS TYPICALLY OCCUR AFTER DARK, ON DESERTED STREETS IN RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOODS; MUGGERS ARE USUALLY YOUNG, UNEMPLOYED AND LOOKING FOR MONEY WITH WHICH TO BUY LIQUOR (IN THE U.S., READ "DRUGS"); THEY FREQUENTLY WORK IN PAIRS OR IN A GANG; VICTIMS MAY BE KNOCKED OFF THEIR FEET, THEIR WALLET OR HANDBAG LIFTED IN THE CONFUSION, OR ROBBED AT KNIFE-POINT.

5. WHILE LOCAL MYTHOLOGY PUTS KNIVES ONLY IN THE HANDS OF HOT-TEMPERED GEORGIANS AVENGING THEIR HONOR AT THE KUZNECHNIY MARKET -- AN IMAGE, INCIDENTALLY, NOT WITHOUT BASIS IN FACT (SEE "SMENA," MAY 28; "VECHERNIY LENINGRAD," SEPT. 2) -- KNIVES ARE APPARENTLY THE WEAPON OF CHOICE FOR THE MAJORITY OF LENINGRAD'S CRIMINALS. A KNIFE FIGURES IN MORE

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THAN HALF OF THE VIOLENT CRIME STORIES RECOUNTED IN THE LOCAL PRESS. HARDENED CRIMINALS, WHO IN A COUNTRY WITH LESS STRINGENT FIREARM LAWS WOULD OWN A GUN, ARE LIKELY IN THE SOVIET UNION TO USE A

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KNIFE: THUS, THREE LENINGRAD HOODLUMS WHO COM-  
MANDEER A TAXI AS A GETAWAY CAR "FLASH A BLADE"  
TO COERCE THE DRIVER TO TAKE THEM WHERE THEY WANT  
TO GO ("LENINGRADSKAYA PRAVDA," AUG. 7). FIRST  
OFFENDERS, AN ARTICLE IN "SMENA" (AUG. 14) SUGGESTS,  
ARE LIKELY TO BE KNIFE-TOTING TEENAGERS WHO FLARE  
INTO VIOLENCE DURING A DRUNKEN SPREE: A LENINGRAD  
HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT STABS A STRANGER IN A PHONE  
BOOTH BECAUSE "HE WAS TALKING TOO LONG; I GOT  
MAD."

6. CRIMES INVOLVING GUNS, THOUGH RARE, ARE NOT  
UNPRECEDENTED. CONTACTS ASSURE US THAT GUNS,  
SMUGGLED INTO THE USSR THROUGH CENTRAL ASIA OR  
STOLEN FROM SOVIET MILITARY AND MILITIA ARMORIES,  
CIRCULATE ON THE BLACKMARKET. THEIR MAIN BUYERS  
ARE REPORTEDLY "SOVIET MAFIOSI," MEMBERS OF THE  
CRIMINAL UNDERGROUND. OUR TWO-YEAR SURVEY OF THE  
LOCAL PRESS SHOWS ONLY ONE REPORT OF A CRIME IN-  
VOLVING THE USE OF FIREARMS: THE OCT. 15 EDITION OF  
"LENINGRADSKAYA PRAVDA" FEATURED AN ACCOUNT OF THE  
CAPTURE OF AN "ARMED AND DANGEROUS CRIMINAL" ON  
THE HIGHWAY BETWEEN TALLINN AND LENINGRAD. THE  
CRIMINAL, PERPETRATOR OF AN UNNAMED BUT HEINOUS  
ACT, HAD "MANAGED TO SEIZE AN AUTOMATIC RIFLE AND  
80 CARTRIDGES." IN HIS PANICKED FLIGHT FROM  
AUTHORITIES, HE OPENED FIRE ON TWO MILITIAMEN  
AT THE TALLINN TRAIN STATION AND MADE HIS GETAWAY  
IN A TAXI, KIDNAPPING THE DRIVER AND TAKING A  
HOSTAGE. NEAR LARVA, HE SHOT UP A HIGHWAY PATROL  
CAR. THE CRIMINAL WAS FINALLY STOPPED ON THE OUT-  
SKIRTS OF LENINGRAD, WOUNDED BY MILITIA BULLETS,  
THE DAY'S ONLY CASUALTY.

7. ALTHOUGH THE PRESS GENERALLY AVOIDS SENSATIONALISM,  
ONE CRIME STORY WE CAME ACROSS WAS SUFFICIENTLY  
LURID TO DO THE N.Y. DAILY NEWS PROUD ("SOVETSKAYA  
ESTONIYA," OCT. 18). A 17-YEAR-OLD LENINGRAD BOY  
ENTERED THE HOME OF A 63-YEAR-OLD TALLINN WOMAN,  
STRUCK HER OVER THE HEAD WITH A HAMMER, ROBBED HER  
OF A LARGE SUM OF MONEY AND THEN, LEAVING THE WOMAN

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UNCONSCIOUS BUT STILL ALIVE, SET THE HOUSE ON FIRE IN AN ATTEMPT TO DESTROY THE EVIDENCE OF HIS CRIME. THE WOMAN BURNED TO DEATH. THE SUBSEQUENT TRIAL REVEALED THAT THE YOUTH, SERGEY RODIONOV, HAD PREVIOUSLY COMMITTED TWELVE "VICIOUS" CRIMES IN LENINGRAD WITHOUT BEING APPREHENDED; ALL HIS VICTIMS WERE ELDERLY. RODIONOV RECEIVED THE MAXIMUM PENALTY FOR A MINOR, 10 YEARS IN PRISON (THE MAXIMUM ADULT PENALTY IS DEATH). (COMMENT. THE PARALLELS WITH "CRIME AND PUNISHMENT" STRIKE US AS MORE THAN CASUAL: RODIONOV, LIKE RASKOL'NIKOV, IS THE "IDEAL" SON OF A "GOOD" FAMILY; HIS WEALTHY VICTIM, ALTHOUGH NOT A PALMBROKER, ALSO MAKES HER MONEY ILLICITLY, RUNNING A "PRIVATE" HOTEL IN HER HOME; RODIONOV IS APPREHENDED THROUGH THE WORK OF A CLEVER PROSECUTOR WHO BECOMES OBSESSED WITH THE CASE; "RODION" IS RASKOL'NIKOV'S FIRST NAME. THESE LITERARY DETAILS SUGGEST THAT THE ARTICLE IS TO SOME DEGREE A FICTION, ITS AIM NOT OBJECTIVE REPORTING BUT MORAL INSTRUCTION: ALL CRIMES WILL, IN THE END, BE DISCOVERED. END COMMENT.)

8. COMMENT. THE CRIMES REPORTED BY OUR CONTACTS, UNLIKE THOSE IN THE PRESS, ARE NEVER SOLVED. MUGGERS AND MURDERERS CONTINUE TO ROAM THE STREETS, THEIR EXISTENCE A FACT OF DAILY LIFE IN LENINGRAD. THE CAUSES OF CRIME HERE, AS CITED BY THE PRESS, ARE FAMILIAR TO ANY AMERICAN CITY DWELLER: YOUNG PEOPLE'S ALIENATION, UNSTABLE FAMILY LIFE, JUVENILE UNEMPLOYMENT ("PARASITISM"), AND ALCOHOLISM. MANY OF OUR CONTACTS SEE THE INCREASE OF VIOLENT CRIME, ALONG WITH THE DECLINE IN THE FOOD SUPPLY, AS EVIDENCE OF THE DECAY OF THE SOVIET SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC SYSTEM. END COMMENT. SQUIRE

END OF MESSAGE

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